



# COMPLETE GLOSSARY FOR ELCA STUDY CURRICULUM ON CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH

**Book of Concord:** A collection of writings from 1580, published on the 50th anniversary of the 1530 Augsburg Confession, that were subscribed to by some 80 princely and municipal governments and are generally understood as authoritative documents of the Evangelical/Lutheran movement. The most widely adopted include the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and Luther's catechisms, but all have some status among today's Evangelical/Lutheran churches.

**Bonhoeffer, Dietrich:** German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident. Among other things, he is known for his writings on the Christian role in civic engagement and was a key founding member of the Confessing Church. (See "Confessing Church.")

**Cheap grace:** A term from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship* that he describes as preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, as grace without discipleship, as grace without the cross, and as Christian faith without Jesus Christ, the living and incarnate one.

**Christian nationalism:** A cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of certain Christian views with American civic life. This political ideology, whether explicit or not, includes the beliefs that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired and enjoys godly status, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the U.S., that the nation holds a special status in God's eyes, and that good Americans must hold Christian beliefs. Proponents range from those who believe the U.S. should be declared a Christian nation (approximately 21% of the U.S. population) to those involved in more virulent strains that are openly racist, anti-democratic, or gang like. The symbols and ideology of Christian nationalism were widely evident during the Jan. 6, 2021, attempt to throw out certified U.S. election results.

**Church:** Multiple meanings, largely dependent on context. Fundamentally "church" is the event of God's presence wherever two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:30). In the Lutheran tradition this event is specifically identified with God's commands and promises in the proclamation of the word and distribution of the sacraments. In its widest sense the term is universal (catholic) describing all baptized believers in their individual capacity as followers of Christ trying to live faithfully in their various vocations. The term is used to designate large Christian bodies or institutions but also local congregations, as in "going to my church." In this study dedicated to the church's role in civic life, it most often carries the institutional meaning.

**Civic engagement:** Points to various ways in which individuals and institutions engage in public/civic life. Examples include voting, public service, street demonstration, contacting legislators, local service in volunteer agencies, and fervent prayer for government leaders.

**Clericalism:** The belief, policy, and practice maintaining the power of a religious hierarchy.

**Common good:** Has various philosophical definitions but is used here to denote what is beneficial for all or most members of a given community. In particular it conveys that seeking the general welfare of all members of the public is the purpose of government and is achieved, often imperfectly, through collective action, citizenship, and other forms of active participation in the realms of politics and public service.

**Community of moral deliberation/discernment:** A concept established in the first ELCA social statement, *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* and considered an element of the ELCA's identity into which our church must grow. The concept envisions the whole Christian community praying for each other, studying Scripture, and wrestling together toward moral understanding and action. This approach to doing ethics is ground-up, rather than top-down. Its roots are found in Reformation writings such as the Smalcald Articles of the Book of Concord that spell out the marks of the church, one of which is "the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters."

**Confessions:** Has wider meanings in Scripture and historical theology, but in this study it designates the ELCA's authorized teaching standards. (See "Book of Concord.")

**Confessing Church:** A movement for revival within the German Protestant churches that developed during the 1930s as resistance to the Nazi government's efforts to make the churches in Germany an instrument of brownshirt Christianity, that is, an instrument dedicated to National Socialist influence, policy, and politics.

**Discernment:** The practice of evaluating multiple factors found in an issue with the intent to make an appropriate response to the matter that is God-pleasing. It generally implies active theological or ethical reflection involving study, prayer, and dialogue. It seeks wisdom from God's Spirit in order to make decisions not according to one's individual desires but, as much as possible, according to God's will. For more read Romans 12:1-2. (See "Community of Moral Deliberation.")

**Establishment clause:** The first clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It states that government "shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion." This means that government cannot establish a state/national religion or impose any form of worship or devotion upon its citizens. It does not mean that a person's religious commitments cannot or should not enter and influence their public life, whether in the form of political activity or broader civic engagement. (See also "Separation of Church and State" and "Free Exercise of Religion.")

**Ethics:** The science and art of asking "What ought to be?" or "How then shall we live?" or "What is the good?" Ethics implies extended reflection and dialogue toward defining, negotiating, structuring, and critically engaging what ought to be, or what ought to be done. It is a practice toward determining who we should be, what we should seek, and what we should do as individuals and as a community. It analyzes a current, accepted moral structure or piece of it to determine its rationale or ways it should be altered. The terms "ethics" and "morals" are often used interchangeably, but see "Morality."

**Faith:** Has many meanings and uses, but the fundamental Lutheran emphasis is a trusting response to and trusting relationship with God. This relationship is expressed through means such as active participation in religious communities and attention to key teachings of the church universal.

**Free exercise clause:** The second phrase in the First Amendment, regarding government's relation to religious practice under the constitution. Unlike the establishment clause, it focuses on the relationship between faith and public/civic life. The first clause, prohibiting establishment of a state religion, clears the ground for the faithful to determine their own best way of exercising faith in their own public life. (See "Establishment Clause" and "Separation of Church and State.")

**Law and Gospel:** Expresses the key Lutheran emphasis that God's Word and work in human society occur under different means. "Law" is understood to have two forms: (1) as a directive and corrective for society (first, or civil, use) and (2) judgment on sin (second, or theological, use). The term "Gospel" is the good news of God's mercy, received in faith on account of Jesus Christ.

**Luther, Martin (1483-1546):** German priest, theologian, author, and professor. He was a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation and is the namesake of Lutheranism.

**Mega-identity:** Describes an interlocking set of identifications. Identifications include social descriptions such as being urban, rural, ethnic, religious, conservative, liberal. When these identifications cohere in a set that is semi-fixed and loaded with huge emotional stakes, they become a mega-identity that walls off people from others who don't share the same set of characteristics or beliefs.

**Morality/morals:** Originates from the Greek word "mores," which designated the binding customs of a culture or society related to what is good or right. It designates the existing or already negotiated moral structure. In every society, certain actions, goals, and character traits are considered moral, immoral, or some combination thereof, according to established norms. "Ethics" and "morals" often are used interchangeably, but see "Ethics."

**Neighbor justice:** Describes meeting neighbors' needs in public life. Though rooted in the biblical directive to "love your neighbor as yourself," it expresses how faith active in love requires seeking justice in relationships and in the structures of society.

**Partisanship:** Strong and sometimes blind adherence to a specific party, group, faction, set of beliefs, or set of personal characteristics.

**Partisan polarization:** As used in this study, a partisanship that so completely distinguishes its partisans from another group that the other group's beliefs and views are considered utterly opposite and most often inferior, dangerous to society, and unworthy of talking about together. The polarization is such that there is no value or respect for "those people." In everyday speech it is often expressed in the saying "my way or the highway."

**Politics:** From the Greek term "polis" for the city or place of the people, this designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when, where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government that is intended to seek the common good. (See "Common Good.")

**Priesthood of all believers:** The view elaborated in the Reformation that all baptized Christians enjoy equal spiritual status in the sight of God, with equal capacity to have faith, pray, give witness, and do what is God-pleasing. See, for instance, 1 Peter 2:9: "You are ... a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

**Quietism:** As used here, describes a passive, withdrawn attitude or practice toward public or civic affairs. This withdrawal may be intentional policy or simply a practice, but both are characterized by quiet acceptance of the civic status quo and avoidance of political engagement. This approach to public life has a long track record among many Lutherans even though it was not evident in the Reformation period.

**Separation of church and state:** Usually a shorthand for the establishment clause that forbids state-sponsored religion. The specific meaning of the phrase is contested. For example, many people, including religious people, believe it means that religious convictions and politics should flow in completely separate streams. (See "Quietism.") The ELCA constitution, on the other hand, endorses institutional separation with functional interaction and argues that the church as a civic body should avoid partisanship but engage in civic life because God calls people of faith to join God's activity there.

**Sin:** Expresses the human proclivity for being in opposition to God. Sin is variously described as disobedience, lack of trust, self-centeredness, pride, or complacency, among other things. Sin occurs in an individual's thoughts and actions but also is expressed in organizations, institutions, and systems. In the last three cases, it is often termed "structural sin."

**Theology:** Can indicate academic or abstract reflection, but use of the term in this study refers to faithful talk about anything related to God. Every person of faith, therefore, engages in theology when expressing thoughts about God, the church, God in relation to civic life, etc.

**Three estates:** Used to designate the broadest divisions of social hierarchy in Christendom (Christian Europe) from the Middle Ages to early modern Europe. There is some variation in meaning, depending on the time and locale invoked. In Reformation thinking, the three overarching divisions (estates) were identified as the church, the government, and the family (which included all economic functions).

**Two kingdoms:** A traditional theological term from the Reformation regarding the proper distinction of God's activity in the world: through secular means, such as government, versus God's gracious activity in the church. ELCA teaching describes this as God's two ways or two hands rather than as two kingdoms. God's "right hand" conveys the tangible power of God's love and forgiveness to people of faith, which stirs us to forgive others, to express mutual love and care, and to strive for justice. God's "left hand" works through human roles, structures, and institutions to foster the social well-being of the people and the world God creates. The ELCA teaches that God's two ways of governing are both necessary and interrelated. The institutions of government and church are distinct but have appropriate functional interaction.

**Vocation:** in this study, refers to a calling from God that comes both as gift and task. The ELCA understands baptismal vocation as fundamental; it is God's saving call lived out in joyful response through service to the neighbor in daily life. This overarching vocation is expressed in multiple callings (or specific vocations) such as being a responsible citizen, parent, student, worker, etc.

**Word:** Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom God's message to us as both Law and Gospel reveals God's judgment and mercy. The ELCA constitution holds that the Word is expressed in creation and in the history of Israel but is centered in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament are the written Word of God in the sense that they are inspired by God's Spirit speaking through the authors as they record and announce God's revelation centering Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.